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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 001073

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: CONSUL GENERAL'S CALL ON TURKISH-ARMENIAN ORTHODOX
PATRIARCH MESROB II

REF: A. 06 ANKARA 6593

[B](#). ADANA 0047

[C](#). ISTANBUL 0929

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The leader of the Armenian Orthodox community in Turkey, His Beatitude Mesrob II, during the Consul General's introductory call, expressed optimism that the government will soon pass a proposed new Law on Foundations. He stressed progress for Armenia depended on reconciliation with Turkey and that his community was caught in the middle of the divisive "genocide" debate. Contrary to all previous accounts, including one his own attorney provided four days earlier, Mesrob believed some undocumented Armenian immigrants had been targeted for deportation following the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee approval of the Armenian genocide resolution, although he provided no specifics. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Consul General stressed her commitment to advancing USG priorities on religious freedom during a December 10 introductory call on Armenian Patriarch for Istanbul and all of Turkey Mesrob II. Though the 70 thousand-strong Turkish-Armenian community has complete freedom to worship, the Patriarch advised administrative restrictions continue to interfere with religious minority property and education rights. Mesrob admitted to not having seen the content, but noted the proposed new Law on Foundations was a positive sign and remained hopeful the new Turkish President would not veto it, as had former President Sezer after parliament passed the law for the first time a year ago (ref A). "We just want the ability to use the properties as we want," explained Mesrob.

[1](#)3. (C) Mesrob characterized the Justice and Development Party (AKP)-led government as more lenient and cited its "common thinking" with religious minorities with regard to valuing faith, as a positive influence. The Patriarch had recently spoken to PM Erdogan who had promised the Law on Foundations would pass. At the same time, Mesrob expressed disappointment that the government had not permitted a cross to be placed on a 10th century Akdamar Island Armenian Church, which was recently renovated by the government and opened as a museum (ref B). A proposal to train Armenian Orthodox clergy within a theology department of an existing Turkish university had also stalled, he lamented.

[1](#)4. (C) Consul General expressed regret that a speech Mesrob was to have given recently at Georgetown University had been called off. The Patriarch affirmed reports that the university had cited security concerns as justification for canceling the event. This was unfortunate, he believed, as he was not planning to speak about the "genocide" issue, but

rather about the importance of Turkish-Armenian relations. Opening the border, establishing diplomatic relations and encouraging more exchange between the citizens of the two countries should be the priority for improving the state of affairs in Armenia, argued Mesrob.

¶5. (C) Responding to Consul General's inquiry concerning his opinion on how to advance reconciliation, Mesrob - for the first and only time during the entire conversation - broke away from his reserved tone, with an impassioned, "It happened!" How to discuss and move on from the "genocide" issue is now the challenge, he maintained. The Turkish-Armenian community could not take an active role because its relations with both Turkey and the Diaspora were at stake. Underscoring his vulnerability, Mesrob admitted he received daily threats and confirmed recent press reports that the government had assigned a security agent to protect him.

¶6. (SBU) Regarding the 40 thousand undocumented Armenian immigrants in Turkey, Mesrob noted the biggest challenge was education. Undocumented children are not eligible to attend school in Turkey and the government had thus far turned down his appeals to address this issue. In response to Consul General's inquiry concerning rumors of targeted deportations of some within the undocumented community following the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) approval of the Armenian genocide resolution on October 10 (ref C), Mesrob stated it was true some people were deported, though he did not know how many.

¶7. (C) Comment. Mesrob's account of limited, targeted deportations of undocumented Armenians contrasts with all previous responses we had received to this inquiry from

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various Turkish-Armenian contacts representing a wide spectrum of society. His own attorney told us as recently as December 6 that though a few Armenians have been deported, there was no reason to believe they had been targeted as a result of the HFAC vote. Despite being caught in the middle, Mesrob remains one of the best spokespersons for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. As such, his continued dialogue with PM Erdogan is an encouraging sign. End comment.

WIENER